



**SPARX is an interactive
game-world designed to
help young people who
are feeling down.**

sparx.org.nz



Introduction



**KIA ORA, TALOFA LAVA, MALO E LELEI, NI HAO,
NAMASTE AND WELCOME.**

Thank you for taking the time to read about SPARX. SPARX is a self-help tool designed to support young people feeling down, depressed or stressed.

The information in this booklet can help you support your young person while they are using SPARX. You will also find helpful tips about how to help give your young person hope about feeling better. Generally, people do recover from feeling down or depressed. Every young person is different – just keep trying and support them! Another way to support your young person is to try SPARX yourself. This will help them know they are not alone and that they can ask questions about feeling down, worried or stressed. SPARX is free to use for anyone in New Zealand.

WHERE TO GET HELP

If your young person is thinking of hurting or killing themselves, reach out and talk with someone who's trained to help right now:

- free phone **0508 4 SPARX (0508 477 279)** or free text **3110**
- Call **111** if they might be unsafe right now.

If your young person is safe there are many others who might help too:

- a health service (family doctor/GP, youth health service, school health service)
- a counselor, a therapist, Youthline or Lifeline

If you are unsure about safety, please do reach out.

LEVEL ONE

FOREST – FINDING HOPE



KEY LEARNING

This level is about depression and how to cope with it. Depression is fairly common for young people as one in six young people experience it.

In this level the importance of using relaxation skills, such as deep breathing is taught. These skills help us to be calm and to feel less stressed.

This level also looks at how changing thoughts from negative to more positive can make us feel better.

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Talk about a time when you were feeling down or blue, and how you made a change. What particular skills or strategies worked for you? What do you do to feel better about yourself and life in general? Share these ideas with your young person.

Ask questions about how they found the relaxation skills in this level. Look at what is working well, and find out if they find any of these skills difficult. For example, if they say they find it hard to remember to do the deep breathing, you could do this together at a scheduled time.

LEVEL ONE

FOREST – FINDING HOPE



Discuss how changing negative thoughts into more positive thoughts can create positive feelings. Have this talk three to five times over a week. Try to notice whether there has been an increase in positive thoughts and feelings for your young person. If you do notice a change, be sure to point it out. It will mean a lot to them that you noticed – even if they might find it hard to say so.

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind them to use their relaxation skills.

The breathing skills will help them to calm down when they need it.

Remind them that it will take some practice for their bodies to gain the most benefit from these skills – just like increasing physical fitness.

Ask them if they have been able to practice these skills. Offer to practice it with them. Check in with your young person about how they are going and if they have noticed more positive feelings.

LEVEL TWO

ICE CAVE - BEING ACTIVE



KEY LEARNING

This level is about learning to keep active when feeling sad or depressed. When a young person feels depressed they can feel unmotivated, tired, irritable and sad. They also appear to be doing less of the things that they would normally enjoy.

A young person can quickly enter a downward spiral where the less they do, the worse they feel. It is important to learn that this cycle can be reversed very simply by increasing the amount of activities that they do. Doing more means feeling better.

Each day suggest your young person does one thing that makes them feel like they have achieved something. Even just trying a bit of exercise can be a great start.

“Fake it till you make it” can be an important skill to learn and use. Hardly anyone is born confident. For example, to act more confident young people can smile, make eye contact and say something like “hello” loud and clearly.

DO IT

Choose one activity a day and simply do it.

Do more = Feel better

SORT IT

Remember you can 'fake it till you make it'. Smile, make eye contact, and say something like hello loud and clearly.

RELAX

Stress makes your body feel tired and tense. Remind your young person that they can either complete the muscle relaxation exercise that they learnt or they can complete some exercise.

LEVEL TWO

ICE CAVE - BEING ACTIVE

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Ask them how they found the tips in SPARX about trying to keep active or what they think they can try today.

Ideas for activities they could try are to go for a walk, listen to some music, call someone they know, play sport, read a book, do some art, go to the mall, find a cool new app, visit a friend, or choose something that is totally relaxing.

Suggest taking them somewhere if they are unmotivated. Try small steps first –small steps can have big results.

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind them to use their skills and that it will take some practice for their bodies to gain the most benefit from being active.

LEVEL THREE

VOLCANO – DEALING WITH EMOTIONS



KEY LEARNING

This level is about learning to identify and cope with strong feelings. Young people will learn it's okay to have strong feelings but it's what you do with the feelings that matter. They learn the flowing saying: "Remember, don't hurt yourself or others, or damage other people's property."

Your young person will also learn how to SPOT strong emotions before they lead to a strong reaction. In the next level, they will learn about what coping strategies to use when overwhelmed by strong emotions.

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Start by talking about a strong emotion you have had to deal with. Explain how you learned to deal with it or are possibly still learning to deal with.

Here are some questions to ask:

- "How did you learn to identify the strong emotions you have?"
- "Are there any skills that you use to deal with strong emotions? Which ones work best for you?"

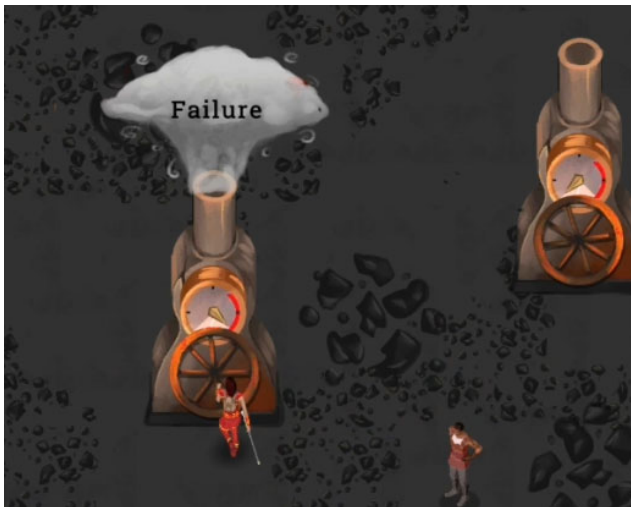
LEVEL THREE

VOLCANO – DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind your young person to use their skills.

Remind them that it will also take some practice for them to gain the most benefit from them.



SPOT IT

Your young person has learned the following skills:

BLINC:

Listen to other people by using the BLINC technique:

B = Bite your tongue

L = Look at the speaker

I = Be interested (sometimes you might need to pretend)

N = No interruptions

C = Check you understand

Assertiveness skills:

- Don't be agro, don't be a push over.
- Say what you need in a calm way.
- Use "I" statements.

Learn to identify your triggers:

These could be put downs, being yelled at, arguments with friends or fights with adults.

Use distractions:

- Walk away, say nothing and count to 20
- Play some sport
- Talk to someone
- Use slow breathing to relax
- Listen to music or surf the web

THE STEPS EXERCISE

- S** = Say what the problem is.
Be as clear and specific as you can.
- T** = Think of solutions as many as you can, even ones that would seem challenging.
- E** = Examine these ideas; look at the pros and cons of the best ones.
- P** = Pick one and try it.
- S** = See what happens.
Try again if that solution didn't work.

LEVEL FOUR

MOUNTAIN - OVERCOMING PROBLEMS

KEY LEARNING

This level is about learning how to solve problems in our lives. Your young person will learn how important it is to **SPOT** both positive and negative thoughts. Positive thoughts are called **SPARX** – positive or helpful thoughts about ourselves and the future. They make us feel good. Negative thoughts are called **GNATs** – they are **Gloomy Negative Automatic Thoughts**. Young people are also taught how to use **STEPS** to deal with problems.

LEVEL FOUR

MOUNTAIN – OVERCOMING PROBLEMS



CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Talk about what SPARX you have in your life. What are they? Do you feel better when you think about these SPARX?

Discuss how you solve problems in your life, what works for you. What skills can you pass on to your young person?

Ask your young person what SPARX or positive thoughts they have spotted in their lives. Talk about the SPARX you have noticed in your life.

If your young person is unsure about what SPARX are in their life just ask them what they are thankful for, these can be the hidden SPARX. Keep it simple. This could turn into a discussion about what things we are most thankful for.

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind them to use their skills and that it will take some practice to gain the most benefit from them. Also, reinforce the learning to do with the **STEPS** technique.

LEVEL FIVE

SWAMP – RECOGNISING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS



KEY LEARNING

This level is about learning to SPOT unhelpful or negative thoughts, called GNATs (Gloomy Negative Automatic Thoughts). This is an important skill to learn because negative thoughts are toxic and can lead to increased thinking about negative situations and feelings, making us feel worse. We can all learn to be the boss of our own thoughts.

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Have you been able to spot GNATs with your own thinking? What are the most common negative thoughts that you experience? Share these with your young person and let them know what has helped you.

Ask your young person what GNATs they have spotted in their lives. Explain that everyone struggles with negative thoughts from time to time.

LEVEL FIVE

SWAMP – RECOGNISING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

HOW TO SPOT A NEGATIVE THOUGHT

Downer: “Am I looking on the downside and overlooking the positive?”

Perfectionist: “Am I expecting myself to be perfect?”

Mind Reader: “Am I trying to read people’s minds or predict what will happen?”

Guilty: “Am I thinking this is my fault even if it’s not up to me?”

Disaster: “Am I making a bigger deal out of it than it really is?”

All-or-nothing: “Am I seeing things as extreme with nothing in between?”

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind them to use their skills. Remind them it will take some practice to get the most benefit from them.

Your young person has learned how to SPOT the thinking errors they could be making.



LEVEL SIX

TEMPLE – CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

KEY LEARNING

This level is about learning to challenge negative automatic thoughts. Young people are taught that thoughts are not facts – they can learn to SWAP them. Learning to reality test thoughts is an important skill to learn. Young people are also introduced to the RAPA technique to achieve this.

Negotiation skills are also taught. This is an important skill to learn so that we solve our problems and feel like we are in control of our lives.



RAPA - FOUR STEPS TO SWAP A THOUGHT:

- R** = Reality check: How do you know your thought is true?
- A** = Another view: Is there another way to think about it?
- P** = Perspective: Is it really as bad as you think?
- A** = Think 'Action': Think solutions, not problems.

SORT IT

- **Negotiate a deal.**
- **Listen, explain what you need, give a little, take a little and aim for a compromise.**

LEVEL SIX

TEMPLE – CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Talk about a time when you were able to SPOT the GNATs in your life.

How did you do this, what skills worked best for you?

Ask your young person if they can SPOT the GNATS in their life. Invite them to unpack negative thoughts with you, then use the RAPA skill to do this.

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind your young person to use their skills and that it will also take some practice for them to gain the most benefit from them.

SPOT a negative thought and swap it for something better.

LEVEL SEVEN

CANYON – BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER



KEY LEARNING

This level is about summarising all of the learnings and skills that have been taught during SPARX.

If your young person needs more help see:

- **'Get Help Now'** on the SPARX website.
- Free phone **0508 4 SPARX (0508 477 279)** or free text **3110**
- Call **111** if they might be unsafe right now

CONVERSATION STARTERS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Ask them the following: "You have now finished SPARX, which skills seem to be the most useful for you?" Invite your young person to list them.

If you have used some of the SPARX skills yourself, share this with your young person. You can share how you found it a challenge to practice some of the skills.

ALWAYS encourage your young person to ask for help as depression can come back.

LEVEL SEVEN

CANYON – BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

REMIND THEM TO KEEP ON
PRACTICING THE FOLLOWING:

RELAX

DO IT

SOLVE IT

SWAP IT

SPOT IT

SORT IT

SKILLS YOUR YOUNG PERSON CAN PRACTICE

Remind them it will take practice to gain the most benefit from the skills they learned in SPARX.

If one skill does not work encourage them to:

- Try another skill and to be persistent!
- CARRY on even when they feel down – the worst feelings will pass.



WHERE TO GET HELP

If your young person is thinking of hurting or killing themselves, reach out and talk with someone who's trained to help right now:

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If your young person is safe there are many others who might help too:

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